

# A TALE of RED ROSES

By  
**GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER**

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CHAPTER XIV.

## Molly insists on Protecting Bert.

BERT GLIDER strode through the Marley gate and trod on the Marley porch and punched the Marley doorbell in a fine condition of manly indignation, and he demanded of the emaciated butler with the intellectual brow that Molly Marley be brought into his presence at once. He waited in the library while the butler went upstairs with that hasty message, and it was no comfort to his soul whatsoever to hear the girls devoting painstaking attention to an apparently endless job of giggling.

With scant consideration for the importance of the occasion, Molly, her face flushed and her eyes glistening with moisture from her recent earnest efforts, came down when she was ready, and she was still giggling, while Fern, upstairs, could be heard in the throes of frantic laughter.

"Hello, Bert," laughed Molly, holding her hand to her jaw, and she sat down weakly. "What's the mad rush?"

"What did you say to Sledge?" he sternly demanded.

Her most immediate reply to that was another half hysterical outburst. "I'm not quite sure," she giggled. "Fern and I have just been trying to recall it all, but we can only remember the funniest things."

"You've made a fool of him and of me," charged Bert hotly.

"We don't deserve any credit for that," snickered Molly. "It's so easy."

"The man has taken too much for granted," went on Bert, unsoftened by all this hilarity and, indeed, made only more indignant by it. "From what your father says, Sledge seems to believe that our engagement is off and that he has been practically accepted."

Molly put her hand over her mouth to suppress a shriek and, running out into the hall, called Fern. The girls met halfway up the stairway, where Molly explained the glad news, and Bert, standing stolidly out there, found them holding to the balustrade in order that their enjoyment of Sledge's obtuse understanding might not tumble them down the steps. He strode back into the library and barked his shin on a rocker. Molly returned to him presently for more.

"I've been missing my red roses," she confessed. "Now I suppose I'll get some more. What else does he think?"

"Heaven knows," snapped Bert. "He says he's going to the theater with you tonight. Is that correct?"

Molly gleefully nodded her head. "Did you forget that you were going to the club dance with me?" he indignantly went on, feeling like shaking her.

This time Molly shook her head, her eyes gleaming with devilment, and from Fern, still on the stairway, there arose a wild peal.

Bert closed the library doors.

"I forbid it," he commanded.

The change in Molly was so abrupt that it startled him into barking his other shin. First of all she threw open the library doors, knowing, however, that Fern by this time was back in the boudoir.

"You may do your forbidding to Mr. Sledge," she told him, with blazing eyes. "You were thoughtful enough to consider seriously sending me to him, and now whatever follows is up to me. I am going to the theater tonight with Mr. Sledge."

"Molly, Molly, Molly!" shrieked Fern, half running and half bumping down the stairs. "Run to the window, quick, and see the parade! O-o-o-oh! It's coming here!"

Molly laid aside her just indignation for a moment, feeling intuitively that a Sledge miracle was some place in the neighborhood, and glanced out of the window, as Fern, gurgling inco-

herently, flashed by on her way to the door.

Up the winding driveway, one following the other, were two of the most beautiful little colonial coupes in the world, such cars as would make any girl go stark bowling mad with ecstasy. They were exactly alike, except that the one in front was hung with lace and filmy red silk curtains, and the other had blue with its fluffy white. Both the cars were empty, except for the hard featured men who were driving them, looking as much out of place as a coal heaver in a lingerie bonnet.

"The blue one's mine!" exclaimed Fern, dancing up and down in a delirium of joy as Molly joined her at the door, through the hangings of which the girls now peered out in frantic impatience.

"I wonder what brings them here?" speculated Molly, dreading the worst.

"I don't care," returned Fern. "That blue car's mine, and I know it. Molly, do you really suppose it could be a present?"

"Certainly not," decided Molly promptly. "Oh, but aren't they exquisite?"

"Exquisite? They're the dearest, sweetest, darlinest little things I ever saw!" cried Fern. "The only thing that's missing is that there should be a hand leading them. Say, Molly, and here she sank her voice to a giggling whisper, 'I'll bet you that Sledge'—"

"Certainly not," interrupted Molly, almost fiercely, and then she, too, giggled, and the two girls scattered away from the door as the chauffeur of the red car who was the gentlemanly salesman in disguise, dismounted and came slowly up to the door.

They waited in the library with the frowning and bewildered Bert while the thin butler with the tall brow answered the bell, and they distinctly heard the chauffeur ask for Miss Marley and Miss Burbank. They waited in half frightened decorum while the thin butler solemnly brought that message, and then, with no more trace of excitement than if they had been dragged away from a drowsome French lesson, they walked sedately into the hall.

"Miss Marley?" observed that person, nodding to the right girl. "I have the pleasure of bringing out a very beautiful little gift to yourself and Miss Burbank," and here he nodded to the other young lady, who was holding her toes to the floor by gripping them. "The red lined one is for Miss Marley and the blue one for Miss Burbank."

"I said the blue one was mine," half shrieked Fern, unable to contain herself any longer. "I want to ride in it now!"

Molly looked longingly past the person's shoulder out at the red curtained car, and she felt that sick, sick sensation of self abnegation clamoring within.

"Who sent them?" she asked faintly.

"Your father," replied the conscienceless salesman, looking her more clearly in the eye than any honest man could have done. "If you have the time we shall be pleased to give you a lesson in running them."

Fern was halfway upstairs.

"Do you want your gray coat or your furs, Molly?" she called as she went. "Something light," replied Molly, equally excited, running out to inspect the car, with the gentlemanly salesman right at her elbow and highly pleased with his job. The chauffeur in the blue car waited with bright eyes.

Fern, followed by Mina and another maid, both of them too slow to be of any service, came clattering on the porch with two afternoon coats and two bonnets selected with less discrimination than she had ever used and tossed any of them to Molly. "I'll bet it was Sledge," she whispered as she ran and popped into the blue car.

Her coupe was the first to whirl down the driveway, but the red one followed in close order. Bert stood on the edge of the porch, with his hands rammed in his pockets, and watched the end of the world. Being a young man of keen thought, however, after fifteen minutes of numbness he curled his mustache, took up the telephone and called Frank Marley.

"Did you make a present of two automobiles to the girls?" he inquired.

"Did I what?" gasped Marley out of the midst of his plans for making the proposed street car consolidation worth twenty points' advance on his stock to the up state syndicate.

"I thought not," returned Bert, with a very near approach to profanity. "I didn't think you'd weaken our capital by a \$5,000 extravagance of that sort."

"I don't understand you," puzzled Marley.

"Two small enclosed cars came out here about fifteen minutes ago, and the man in charge of them said that you sent them. Personally I think Sledge has been getting fresh."

"It's barely possible," agreed Marley, feeling a dangerous indignation rising within him. "Leave that to me, Bert. As Molly's father it is my affair. I'll investigate it at once."

Palpitating with all a righteous father's jealous care, Frank Marley kept the telephone busy until he located Sledge.

"I say, Sledge," he blurted. "Did you send out a couple of automobiles to my house?"

"Now, Marley," chuckled Sledge.

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Gray, faded hair, though no disgrace, is a sign of old age, and as we all desire a youthful and attractive appearance, get busy at once with Wyeth's Sage and Sulphur and look years younger.

Harper House pharmacy—(Adv.)

"They're toys. You sent 'em. Do they like 'em?"

"I haven't inquired," returned Marley, still standing by his father's dignity. "Really, Mr. Sledge, you know I can't allow my daughter to receive extravagant presents of that sort from any one other than myself."

"Aw, cut it," advised Sledge. "I get you. If they don't like 'em, I'm the goat. If they do, close your trap. You sent 'em."

"Well, but—"

"I say you sent 'em," insisted Sledge, with a gruff loss of his cordiality, which had been apparent in his former tones, and Marley heard the click of disconnection.

Nearly an hour later two shining little colonial coupes, the red curtained one in front, drove up to the Marley porch, where Bert Glider gloomed in the doorway. They were driven by a happy girl each and had no other occupants.

"Come and take a ride with me, Bert," hailed Molly, so full of delight that she had absolutely forgotten her quarrel with him, which was a blow indeed. "You can't drive, though."

Fern had emerged from her car. "I'm going to have my dinner here," she laughingly announced. "I think I shall go to the theater tonight in mine. Jump in Molly's car, Bert, and try it. It rides like a rocking chair."

"No, thank you!" returned Bert coldly. "Those cars are going back to the salesroom. I felt sure that your fa-

ther had not given them to you, after our business arrangement of this morning. They are a present from Sledge."

"Oh, please, no!" pleaded Molly, with a heartick glance at her red curtained car. She had loved it at sight, but now, since she had learned to know it, she adored it. "How do you know that they are from Sledge?"

"I suspected it from the beginning," he sternly informed her. "So I called up your father."

"I said they were from Sledge," cried Fern. "Molly, it was awfully crude of him, but I love him for it—don't you?"

"What did father say?" demanded Molly.

"He is investigating."

Molly marched straight to the telephone and called up her father. He talked to her kindly, wisely and with deliberation, also like a man who had given himself plenty of time for thought. Bert stood at her elbow, listening to one side of the conversation and peering out the other with painfully knotted intellect. Molly turned to him with calm satisfaction.

"Father says that I am to consider the cars as a gift from him," she proudly announced.

Fern executed the full figures of a minuet and sang a merry tra-la-la all the way through. Molly helped her sing and dance the last figure.

"Three cheers!" she exulted. "Now we may keep our cars."

"I never intended to give mine up," Fern affirmed.

Bert walked Molly back into her father's den.

"I have nothing to say about what Fern does," he firmly announced, "but I have something to say about your conduct. You can't shut your eyes to the fact that Sledge has given you this car, and he has no right to do so."

"My father says that I am to consider the car as a gift from him," repeated Molly primly, but with a snap in her eyes.

"That is only an evasion," Bert insisted. "You have willfully misled Sledge into the belief that you intend to put yourself in the position of receiving presents from him, and either this thing must be stopped or there will be unpleasantness between you and me."

"There is one way we can head that off," Molly quietly assured him. "We can break our engagement."

"Impossible!" immediately declared Bert, frightened. "I didn't mean anything like that, Molly, and I attempted to take her hands and perform a little of the foremaking which he had rather neglected."

"I mean it, though," she insisted, drawing her hands away from him. "Our engagement has only brought trouble to everybody concerned and has subjected me to more than one insult which I had no right to expect. If we declare it off both you and father can go right back to where you were in a business way."

"It's too late for that," he assured her, sitting down to reason it out with

her on the commercial plane since she seemed to insist upon it. "I could never regain the political friendship which is necessary to my style of business. My commercial career in this city is at an end, and my social standing would be also. Knowing this, I have been in correspondence with my people in Baltimore. They have a magnificent business opening there for me, but it takes \$100,000 to obtain control of it. I laid the matter before your father, and he investigated it. Our conclusion is this—if we can close up our business satisfactorily here and he can sell this place we shall have in the neighborhood of \$150,000 clear between us. You and I are to marry, go to Maryland with your father, enter into business and take up the social position to which we are entitled. When I take you there as my bride, Molly, everybody's going to be very proud of you, and I am quite sure that you will like the social atmosphere there much better than here. I've dwelt on this so often to you that it must seem like an old story, and yet this is the first time that it has seemed very near to us."

Molly felt herself wondering why this glittering promise failed to thrill her as it had used to do.

"I'll be the proudest Glider that was ever in the family when I can take you home as my wife," he went on. "It's all cut and dried, Molly, and we expect to have everything closed up before our wedding day if we can hold Sledge off that long."

"And yet you send me for help when you hold Sledge off when you could do it yourselves," she retorted. "You actually suggested to me that I should see what I could do with him."

"I don't like the way you're going about it," he confessed.

"You should be proud of me," she proved him. "I think that Fern and I have done a beautiful job of it," and she began laughing. "We're going to be a credit to you. You're ungrateful, and she began to look indignant again."

"Let's forget it," offered Bert, laughing, and took her in his arms. "For the girl for me, Molly, and there won't be any more envied couple in Maryland than we."

He kissed her and held her while he talked to her of the social triumph which awaited them, the topic which had always pleased her most in their plans for the future. After all, she would make a splendidly matched couple. Moreover, she did owe it to her father and Bert to give them something to start.

(Continued next Saturday.)

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